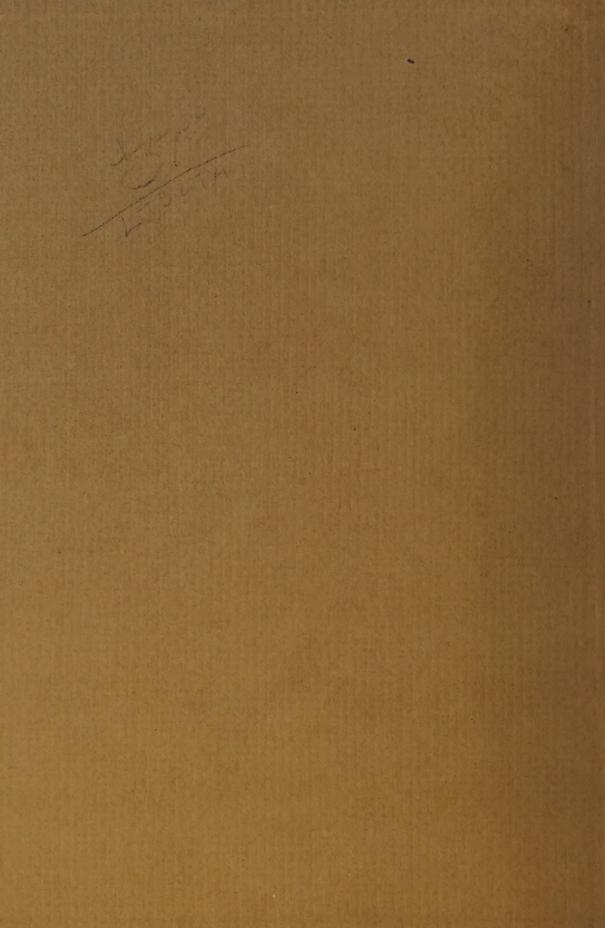
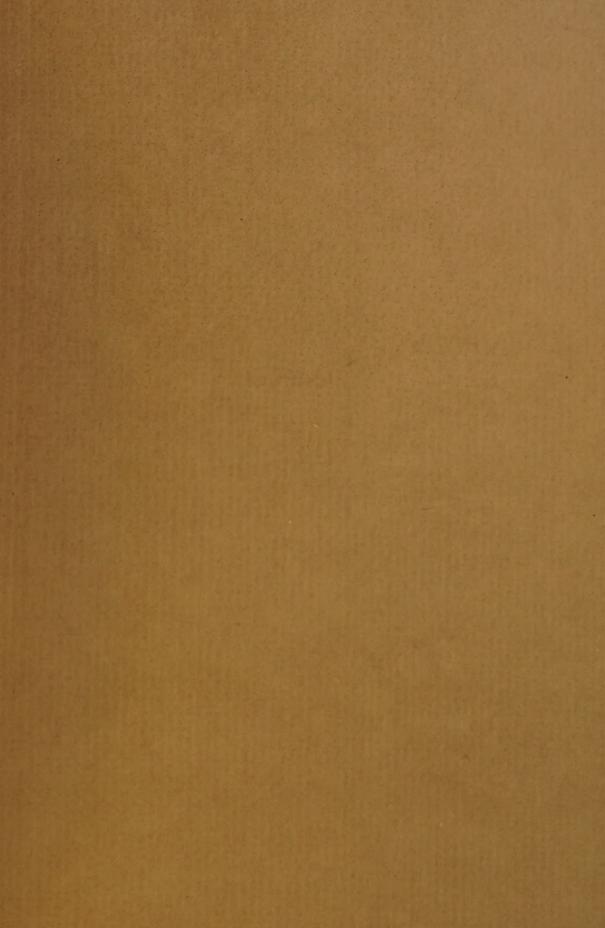
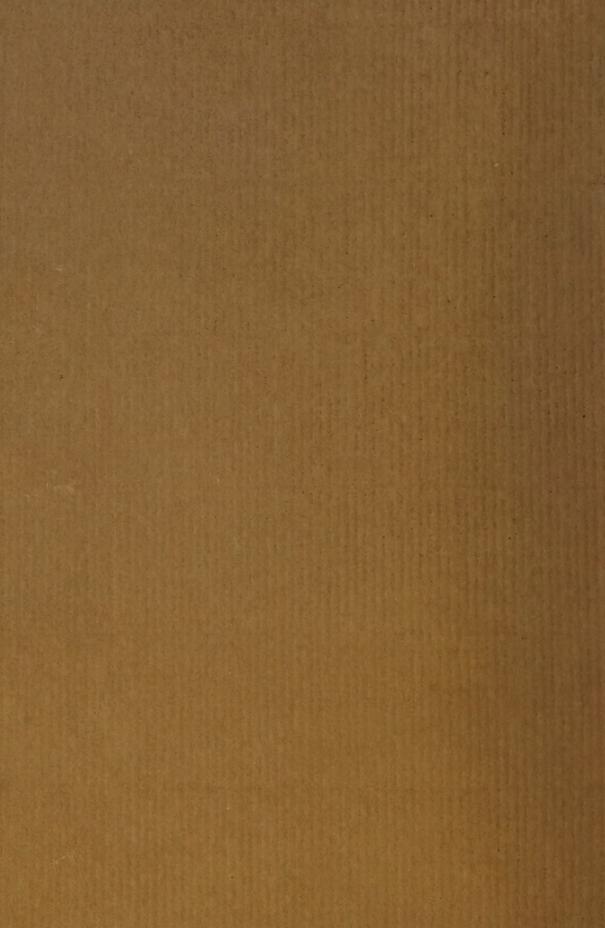
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J. FRANCIS MURPHY By ELIOT CLARK







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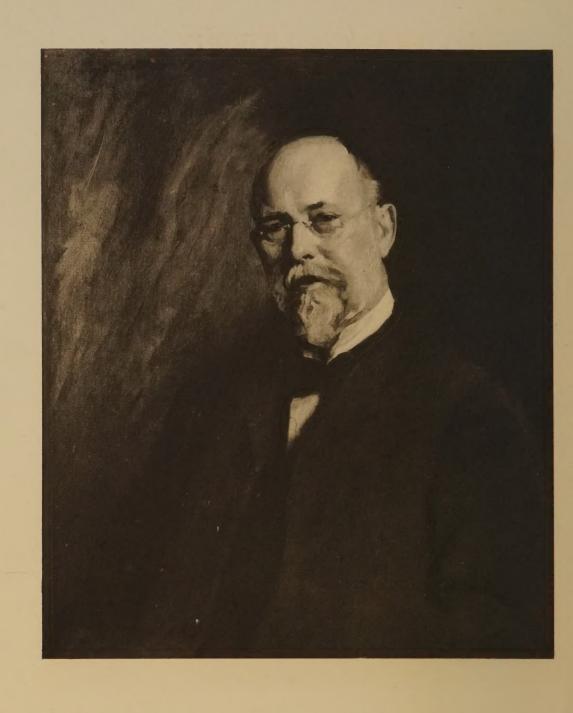
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J. FRANCIS MURPHY

By Irving S. Wiles.
The National Academy of Design, N. Y.

J. FRANCIS MURPHY

BY Eliot Clark



New York
PRIVATELY PRINTED

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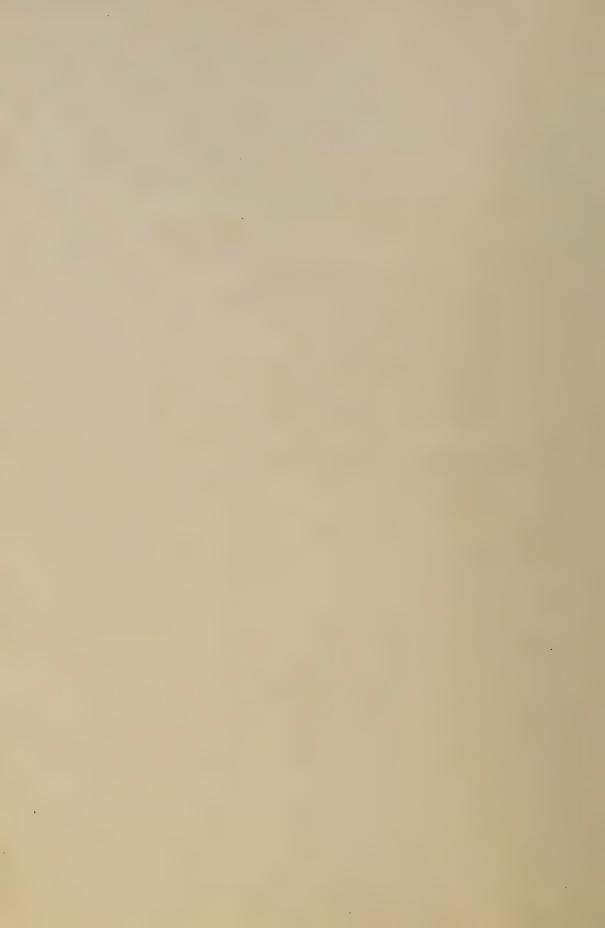
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THE AMERICAN ARTISTS SERIES

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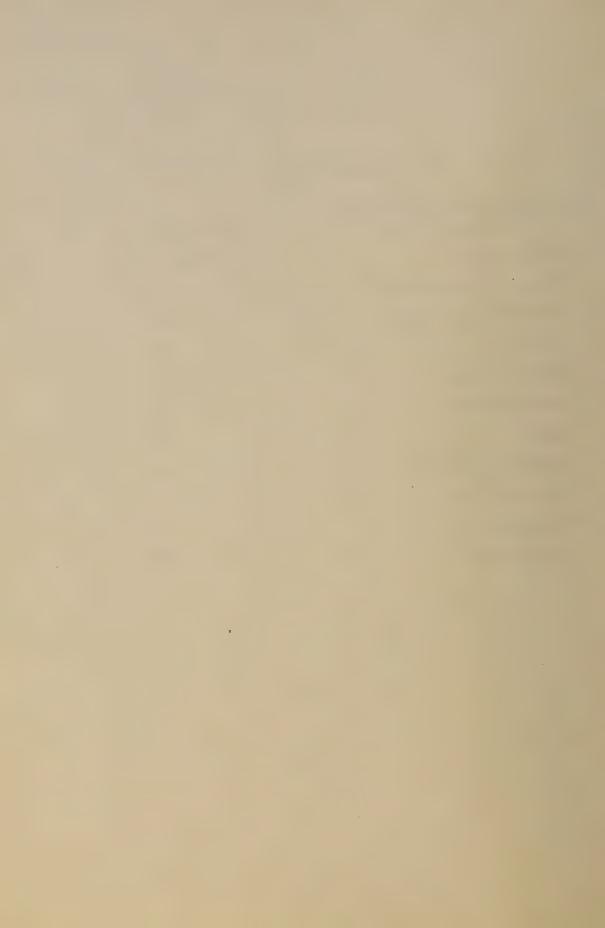
IN PREPARATION

J. Alden Weir. By Frederic Fairchild Sherman. Theodore Robinson. By Eliot Clark. Abbott H. Thayer. George Fuller.



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J. FRANCIS MURPHY



J. FRANCIS MURPHY

PART ONE

HE name of J. Francis Murphy has something of a formal and impersonal flair. Were we to say John Murphy, the association with the artist would at once disappear. One hardly knew his first name to be John. It was never

used. To call him Francis would not have been fitting. There is something in the sound of Francis that did not become the man. To his friends he was simply Murphy; to his intimates, including his wife, he was Murph. The abbreviation of a name imparts a peculiarly human touch and the name Murph was always pronounced with affection. There was only one Murph. This denotes a personality and John Francis Murphy was a unique personality.

He combined a simple, unaffected, easy nature with a shrewd and calculated comprehension. He was not intellectual. He ran around the corner from what might be termed culture. The Sunday newspaper pleased him better. He affected a real dislike for music, but he secretly loved simple melody. He disliked anything on show. Passive, somewhat lethargic, indolent, almost lazy, Murphy was not, however, truly naive. Informal, blunt and outspoken, his artistic expression was, nevertheless, highly sophistize

cated. He was fond of calling his associates by their first name; his greeting was always intimate and hearty, but his conversation was not either spirited or comprehensive. In expressive language he had an un= common vocabulary not found in the dictionary and when animated a keen Irish wit. Occasionally he would make a profound remark. In a discussion on Albert Ryder, a Boston painter, proud of a meticus lous technic, disparagingly remarked that Ryder was avery poor painter. "Yes," said Murphy, "avery poor painter, but a great artist." It was the unspoken word that counted always from Murphy. One knew him not so much from what he said as what he felt. He could pronounce ones name and radiate more than a full blown greeting. He was hearty and friendly but never verbose. Silence didn't trouble him. He spoke directly and indirectly from the heart. He disliked a superior feeling. In fact he cherished the feeling of being one of the boys and never lost that feeling. On several occasions he was asked to be the guest of honor at important functions but declined every such distinction. I am not aware that he ever made a formal address or any form of "speech."

Murphy disliked anything that made him self-conscious. He didn't care for polished manners and dispensed entirely with form. A true romantic in inner sensibility, he never affected the manner or bearing of one in any way different from another. His dress was perfectly simple, but not in any studied sense. The nearest thing at hand that was comfortable would

do. He had no liking for the picturesque or bohemian attire that strikes a pose, any more than for the stiff and awkward garb of formal dress. In later life he wore evening clothes on such occasions when one would be conspicuous otherwise, and in the starched shirt he came to acquire a perfectly normal com-

posure.

Murphy's physiognomy was distinctive, not for any picturesque or striking peculiarity but rather be= cause his headwas particularly well formed. The bald forehead revealed a splendidly clean-cut, well-rounded head, denoting judgment and balance. Impression= ably he was highly sensitive, and his observations searching and profound. But he did not voice his impressions. A gesture would do it easier. He disliked to sit in judgment, but he was a superior judge. He measured accurately the difference between the genuine and the affected, the sincere creation and the superficial stunt.

The creative artist is at once passive and active, receptive and constructive. The highly cultivated intellect often precludes the sensitive and impression= able medium which is so necessary to artistic expression. But the mind of the artist is concerned with other judgments than those of the logical world, and he weighs and measures impressionable forms in a manner incompatible with more truly cerebral judgments. It was in this artistic measure that Murphy's judg= ment was as keen and sensitive as the most astute

logician in the realm of mind.

It is difficult to associate this blunt, simple and rather course nature with the delicate and highly sensitive artist. Yet no artist was more truly of one piece than Murphy and his work bears final testimony of the man, the true signature of the personality.

Apart from his art Murphy's life was singularly devoid of any great interests—no quest of adventure, no vexatious aspirations, no mundane temptations, interrupted his habitual ways; no unexpected changes broke the uniformity of his days. For nearly forty years of his life he spent the greater part of the year at Arkville, his summer home in the Catskill Mountains, but in his work we have hardly a suggestion of his environment. Even his spirit seems never to have been tempted to depart from the serenity of its accustomed mood.

Born at Oswego, New York, April 11, 1853, Murphy's boyhood days were passed during the agistation and strife of the civil war, and he therefore arrived at maturity in the happier days of reconstruction. From one who was associated with a Chicago concern where Murphy was employed as a sign painter about 1870 we learn that although reasonably efficient he was noticably lazy and in consequence was discharged. Murphy was evidently not one given to "punching a clock" and his indolence was due to that form of ruminating which is concerned with other things than sign boards. Saved from defacing the face of nature, and adding to that particularly American form of crying aloud on the landscape, the

THE RIVER FARM

Canvas, 6 inches high, 12 inches wide. Signed and dated lower left, "J. Francis Murphy '84." Collection of Mr. James T. Shepherd, New York. to is distinct to associate new many, sittly each coarse nature with the delicate and high source artist. Yet no artist was more:

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future painter was dreaming of other ways of "sling" ing paint" rather than furthering that unsightly and vulgar competition which wages war with words. He was also saved from the more artificial and indirect way of studying art in the schools where one follows the standardized method of working in charcoal from the antique and life, slaving over highly finished draws ings and perhaps thinking inwardly of fields and sky. Although seemingly self taught, Murphy was in reality learning the direct use of the brush and acquiring a knowledge of the fundamental principles of apply: ing paint in an enduring manner. At the same time he was forming a direct human contact with life, learning at an early age that independence which comes from self support and associating with workers rather than students. In this early training we thus see the beginning of Murphy's later characteristics: his insistence upon the material nature of paint; his human sympathy and his independence.

After the great fire of 1871 Chicago was hardly a favorable place for artistic encouragement and it was fortunate that Murphy moved to New York in 1875. The active section of the city at that time scarcely extended above Forty: Second Street and the comparatively few studios centered about the old Tenth Street studio building. Monticelli's cellar restaurant on Third Avenue was the favorite rendevous of bohesmia where the elect assembled about a long table presided over by the esteemed but somewhat garrulous William Page, president of the National Academy.

There one revived something of the artistic flavor of Italy and painters returning from Rome found a sym= pathetic atmosphere. Murphy rented a studio in Ninth Street next Grace Church. The lower part of the building was occupied by the Vienna Bakery, founded by Fleishman after his success at the Philadelphia centennial of 1876. In the recessed space in front was an open air cafe, while the floors above were converted into studios. Will Low was there before going abroad in 1873 and F. S. Church occupied one of the studios at the time of Murphy's arrival. There was also a Mrs. Manley, sculptress, and other artists, fewofwhom were well known. William Henry Shelton, who came to New York in 1871, writes of Murphy's studio: "As I remember he always had displayed on his easel a pencil sketch of a tree—a slender stem with a few limbs and leaves drawn with great preci= sion—a wonderful study that seems to have served for the foreground tree in somany of his pictures. I think it was the only sort of study he ever made from nature." The pencil studies shown at the memorial exhibition held at the Salmagundi Club give an account of his whereabouts and indicate his manner of working. He had discovered an interesting country in New Jersey, not far from Orange, where he spent some time before coming to New York and where during the summer months he had a number of young lady pupils, one of whom later became his wife. It is the memory of this time that haunts his finest pictures, though the exam= ples of that date are rather tight in handling and show

an insistent following of his pencil memoranda of fore-

ground details and carefully delineated trees.

Murphy was made a member of the Salmagundi Club October 4, 1878. A landscape in black and white presented to the Club at that date shows a surprising maturity for one but twenty-five years of age. The Club, then in its infancy, was formed not merely as a social meeting place but as a studio where the members might come for mutual help and criticism. The membership was composed of young artists just starting upon their career, combined with several amateurs and laymen either actively or sympathetically interested in art. So began an association which formed the most constant background of Murphy's life. Never a club man in the formal sense, Murphy was always at home at the Salmagundi, and for nearly fifty years was a familiar and congenial figure at the table board. In its functional or constructive life he played little part, though he was vice president during the year 1888, but he was a silent force in creating that friendly fellowship which is the greatest charm of Salmagundi. In 1898 he painted one of the panels forming the decoration of the hall in Twelfth Street, and now one of the treasured pictures of the new club house, across the hall from which is the well polished arm palette in silent memory. Notwithstanding his artistic recognition, the early years in New York were a continual struggle for livelihood. His pictures sold for very small prices, but fortunately rent and liv= ing were comparatively low and Murphy was content with the simplest necessities. So he maintained an independence which allowed him to carry on his work according to his heart's desire. In 1876 he exhibited his first picture at the National Academy and thereafter became an annual contributor, being made an associate in 1885 and an academician two years later.

At the age of thirty-five Murphy had arrived at the culmination of the first period of his work and likewise the most constructive epoch of his career. His studio at Arkville was built in 1887, long before the Catskill Mountains were familiar as a summer resort. The country was known by artists for its natural beauty and picturesque surroundings. Cole first worked in Catskill in 1825 and discovered there that "wild and uncontaminated nature" which was dear to the poetic fancy of our Hudson River School; and Durand, F. E. Church, Kensett and others found material for their pictures of mountain fastness and woodland stream. It was the echo of the romanticism of Scott, the association of freedom with remote and un= cultivated places and the religious feeling inspired by nature as the uncorrupted expression of the Creator. Wyant came to Arkville in 1889 and from time to time other well-known painters formed a sympathetic group. Murphy found it a happy retreat to while away the summer days unhindered. It was not so suggestive for his pictures as for its unsophisticated environment. He was fond of backwoods ways, the easy life, the freedom from hurry and of indulging in

TINTS OF THE VANISHED PAST Canvas. Signed at the lower left and dated "J. Francis Murphy 1885." the world of the control of the cont

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his own manner of leisurely contemplation. He never painted out-of-doors, and his pencil studies belong mostly to an earlier date. There is little suggestion of the country in his pictures. Murphy was not tempt= ed by the passing effects of nature, or lured into new ventures by suggestive material. Not gifted with a great imagination his mind was content to live within its own limited sphere. Arkville brought to Murphy the peaceful tranquility of nature, a retreat where he could vegetate during the warm season and prepare the grounds of canvases for work in the more invigorating days of autumn. Then his eye was alert and searching, and although he made no records of partic= ular places he was constantly observing the simple effects of earth and sky, measuring value relations and color harmony.

Murphy had an intuitive approach to nature. He was not learned or scientifically schooled but he created a natural affinity between himself and the animated world. He established communication with the neighboring animals of the field. Squirrels were easily tamed and would come to him unafraid; a large trout in a near by stream knew his presence and would come out from hiding when the approach of another would immediately frighten him away. Likewise he was sensitive to the awakening of vegestation and awaited with eagerness the first signs of new life in spring. He lived largely in this quiet but responsive world and drew from it much of the constentedness and serenity that found its ultimate express

sion in his pictures. He knew the swampy places where vegetation springs lush and luxuriant and waited for the first thrilling note of the tree toad or frog. Transcending the limitations of botanical knowledge he drew from each flower of the field or neglected weed the true character of its kind and knew it in its own environment more intimately than from the revelations of the laboratory.

In the winter at his studio in the Chelseahis finished painting was accomplished. There the inner experience and subjective impression was finally and decisively rendered. The artistic judgment was brought to a focus. There was no puttering. If his pictures portray the subtle and evanescent effects of nature, the final painting was executed with the utmost precision, the nervous and rapid touch of a highly sensitive mind. If his nature was passive and inactive, there is no hesitancy in his painting. It is not only skilled and dextrous but responds perfectly to the introspective mood that haunted his innermost beging.

Murphy relied upon a certain texture, produced by the gradual scraping of hard pigment, which necessizated the ground being prepared many months before the final painting. It came, in a sense, to be a personal mannerism. Started with a vigorous and free brushwork, the paint lost something of its initial vigor but gained in that atmospheric and tonal quality so characteristic of Murphy's art. We observe, therefore, that the structure of ground, although naturalistic in

allowed his initial attack to show, but it forms that heavy underpainting which gives the earth its structural solidity and weight. His pictures were in consequence started well in advance without a definite or final idea, and the Murphy composition brushed with freedom and grace over the hard pigment. This method, so effective in its tonal quality, came to impose a very definite limitation upon his creative conception. It was, however, peculiarly appropriate to the temperament of Murphy. Not necessitating an active mentality or constructive imagination it allowed him the freedom from more laborious and often discouraging creation and at the same time expressed the peculiarly haunting mood of his subjective nature.

Suggestive, free and seemingly impromptuas is the touch of Murphy, there is nothing in the man or his work truly slovenly, accidental or at hazard. Observe his writing: exact and precise; his early signature clear and beautifully written; his later printed signature painted when the picture had long been dry, the final touch of his approval, definitely and deliberately signed. Look at his palette: polished like a piece of lacquer, the colors standing out in calculated relation and in perfect harmony with the polished surface. Likewise his studio: not scattered with unnecessary paraphernalia or unfinished pictures; no sign of the interrupted idea or wasted effort; not showy, affected or consciously artistic, but reflecting the perfect poise and naturalness of the man.

Of an equable and even temperament, combined with an easy and intimate manner, Murphy had many friends. Accepting no executive positions he had few enemies. In the days of trial and hardship he was not bitter or pessimistic; in the days of success and prosperity he was not superior. Always encouraging to younger men, seemingly never jealous, he was himself modest and retiring.

Murphy engaged in few social activities. He was often present on juries of selection or award but ac= cepted no executive responsibilities. He was made a member of the Lotos Club and the Century, but was not an habitue of either. A few constant and old time friends came regularly to the Chelsea. He did not follow either the festive or intellectual activities of the city. The country was his natural background and as early as the weather would permit he was off to his rural haunts. When city interests did not require his presence he extended his stay at Arkville until early winter. Murphy retained much of his boyhood interest in country ways and this brought to his life the little pleasures of every day existence: the paper, the weather, current topics, or a visit from a passing friend. So time passed and years multiplied, the early call of his spirit was answered and his destiny fulfilled.

Whittle thy stick away, oh painter of fields forlorn; pass the time of day with village gossip or truant schoolboy fishing. Watts in England, governed by an unconquerable conscience, was up before light

THE PATH TO THE VILLAGE

Canvas, 21 inches high, 32 inches wide.
Signed lower right, "J. Francis Murphy."

Wm. T. Evans Collection, National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D. C.

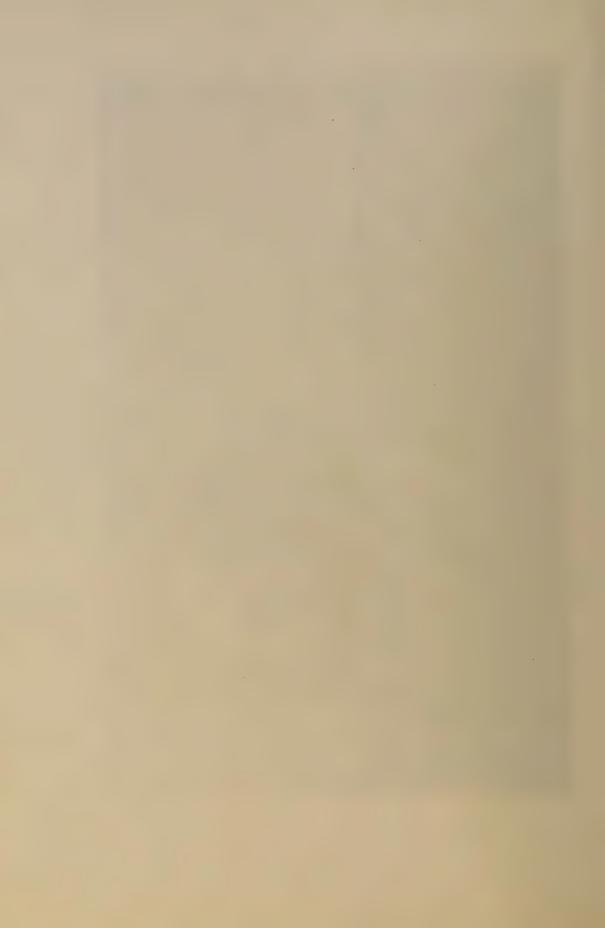
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of day while Carlyle smote with ringing steel and Roosevelt preached the strenuous life. But what is time in the realm of the timeless. Whittle thy stick away, or watch a hoppy toad jump. We are thankful for thy gift. There is music down by the pool, and singing in the night air. Yesterday a hawk ate one of the chickens and tomorrow the widow's boy is in for a good thrashing. But when the time was right and the brush ready there was no whittling. The instrument worked with the precision of magic and the mystical veil was laid out of nothing. Whittle thy stick, and watch the tadpoles grow. A motor car invades the valley and breaks the spell of timelessness. A sound only, yet time measured by speed changes the serenity of the peaks. The painters have gone to other fields and vacationists break the village spell. Perhaps the frogs don't sing as meaningly as before and the stick is getting thin. On exhibition walls the tone has changed. Strident brushwork and loud appeal, color and brilliant spotting break the stillness of the silent hour. The old time days have passed. The autumn is despondent with the early mountain chill. There is winter in the South. It is no longer winter. But hard to the last that little stick: so hard the knife is becoming dull. In the city there is the dress shirt and the cigar, and in the auction room astounding prices. Yes, thy days are done, oh painter of fields forlorn. But thy message is written in ethereal magic across the sky and there is the glamour of the frogs in the pool.

Murphy died on Sunday, January 30, 1921, the year in which the Salmagundi, his second home, celebrated its fifteenth anniversary. Two years previsously he had been greatly weakened by a severe attack of pneumonia and was advised to spend the winters in the South. On his return from Arkville in December he was again stricken with pneumonia which resulted in heart complications; he was taken to Roosevelt hospital and survived only a day. The funeral services were held at the Fine Arts Building in Fiftyseventh Street. The distinguished gathering was an honor and a tribute to the artist and the man. He was buried at Arkville, New York.

PART TWO

To the casual observer there is a striking similarity in Murphy's pictures and his characteristic style is undisputed. But in the study of his work we will find that during nearly fifty years of picture making there is a considerable diversity of expression and subject matter and a gradual but consistent development.

For convenience we may classify Murphy's work in three periods. The first is associated with the so-called Hudson River School; the second shows the influence of the French School of 1830 and its American exponents, Inness and Wyant, while the final period belongs to the mature and ultimate style of the master. Each change marks a decided sacrifice but also brings him nearer to himself. From the scenic landscape to

the chiaroscuro of autumnal sunsets he gradually develops the simple theme of earth and sky, of air and expanse, the serenity and beauty of nature's unaffected harmony. From the conventional attributes of the picturesque he seeks more and more the humble unadorned simplicity of the fields and the ever changing hues of heaven. The study of Murphy's work reveals the skillful picture maker finally discovering that in landscape man sees but the reflection of himself.

Most of the early works are painted on a very small scale. Nature is deliberately arranged to make a pleasing composition. The associative idea belongs to the typical sentiment of landscape: a winding river, veridant trees, distant hills or mountains. There is an apparent balance and adjustment of the principle objects. Not a personal impression of a subject seen and sensed, the composition is a composite and one that meets the qualifications of what a picture is expected to be. A certain sophisticated finish gives to the technic a precious veneer and assures the purchaser of its commercial value. But the content is in no way exalted or profound. In the first period Murphy qualifies as a professional painter and gains a meager livelihood by meeting popular requirements.

We remark that at an early age the painter bescomes a thorough craftsman. His work is never hurs ried or hastily improvised. The smallest picture is given complete consideration both in conception and execution. The paint is applied not only for its imposed artistic significance but for its proper duras

bility. The earliest examples we find today in perfect condition. The picture is not painted as a decorative hanging for a room or as an effective arrangement for an exhibition wall. It is essentially an easel picture to be seen and valued for itself. The artist has a splendid sense of scale and aërial perspective and within the limited dimensions of a book cover conveys the illusion of infinite expanse.

The pencil comes in early use—a pencil with a sharp point—not to record effects but facts: fore ground studies, field flowers, weed entanglements, the ornaments of the earth; tree silhouettes, old houses, barns and other picturesque data. Valuable material that later gives the contour significance and the ground structure. Happily, from the earliest efforts Murphy dated his work. His sketch-book was much in use during the seventies, particularly after his arrival in New York in 1875, when we follow him during the summer months to the neighboring country of New Jersey.

Strange that for one whose viewpoint was later to be in the distance, that in the early studies the interest is in the foreground. But we must remember that following the method of the period the artist did not paint his pictures directly from nature but made intumerable pencil studies of various details which were later brought together in the service of a single conception. The drawings show a decided precision, accuracy, and patience; a definite self-control and a highly concentrated vision. The pencil is used with

an aesthetic understanding of its technical limitations; the tone is not over emphasized and the outline is clear and constructive.

In the formative period we observe three constructive manifestations moulding the work of the future painter. The direct study of nature, recorded in the drawings and impressed upon the perception; the study of pictures and the traditional manner of composing landscape; and the subjective reflection. The first informs the painter and brings together material for subject matter; the second gives form and a method of arrangement; the third imparts the emotional content and is the key to the personality of the painter. We recall many small early pictures which one would not associate with Murphy's later work, pictures complete and pleasing but in which one sees little premonition of the personal mood. Likewise we recall examples painted directly from nature in which the artist shows definite objective realization, rendered with spontaneity and precision. But it is only the occasional picture echoing his inner spirit that reveals the true sentiment of the painter and becomes a symbol of all that is to follow. Murphy is always truly expressive when he reflects himself, when he follows his intuitive sense; but when he deliberate= ly endeavors to make a pleasing picture he becomes perfunctory. There is a landscape in monotone paint ed in 1878 now hanging in the Salmagundi Club in which the potential quality of Murphy's personality is revealed. A landscape in which subject matter is

entirely secondary, wherein mass is used for its aest thetic significance rather than graphic form and the tone sequence solely for unity of effect; a subject not pleasing for its accompanying associations of marsh and mist and yet embodying a truly poetical conception. It indicates how all his later work evolves from the early sentiment and how it originates in tonal unity, simplification of form and expressive massing.

A year later Murphy exhibited at the Salmagundi a landscape in the mood of Inness, an approaching storm under which was a poetical quotation suggestive of the theme. The chiaroscuro is arranged with calculated effect: a distant mass of trees in deep shad= ow with picturesque silhouette, the sun striking the fields with emphatic contrast, the sky ominous and compelling, yet with a splendid reserve and technical control throughout. The darks have been repeatedly glazed to achieve the utmost depth without heaviness of effect. A complete and promising achievement, but one which we have not seen repeated. Thus early the painter, attaining the dramatic, realizes, nevertheless, that his true nature lies in the suggestive and subdued rather than the forceful and emphatic. Dispite the needs of livelihood he strikes repeatedly nearer and nearer to himself, working more and more within the restricted limitations of his nature and finding his true expression therein.

The Last Glow, dated 1882, is more truly a picture of foreground details and is particularly interesting as illustrating the structural understanding of forms

which at a later time were vaguely suggested. It also indicates Murphy's real love of the homely ornaments of the earth and his interest in nature's mystic tracery. This is observed also in The Path to the Village in the Evans' collection at the National Gal= lery. The picture plane begins in the immediate foreground and the land recedes in uninterrupted sequence to the village and the hills beyond. A group of picturesque trees forms the principal contrast of the middle ground. As early as 1882 the picture is unmistak= ably in the Murphy manner, yet in comparing it to the later examples we can see how the painter evolved. Although perfectly simple in composition in The Path to the Village the interest is diverted. We are concerned with foreground details as well as the distant village and the eye is held at the same time by the elaborated line of the trees. Moreover the scale of the objects in the foreground compel one to look down to them rather than over them, and the rather even division of earth and sky dissipates the attention. From a purely graphic or illustrative view the picture is more realistic than the later manner, but from the standpoint of visual impression and emotional reaction it has not at all the same commanding realization or comprehension. We see therefore that Murphy came to eliminate the more patent and popular facts of nature, to sacrifice the objective details, so that he might mag= nify and heighten a single impression, and intensify a oneness of vision. In the Path to the Village the spectator is a detached observer, in the later pictures the

spectator becomes a part of the picture. We must observe also that in each change in Murphy's achievement that he sacrifices the most popular and objective interests and enhances the personal and subjective mood.

In 1885 Murphy was awarded the Second Hallgarsten Prize for his picture, called rather curiously, Tints of a Vanished Past. In subject it is most humansly interesting, in color most ingratiating, and an extremely lovely picture. It marks as it were a culmination of the early period. Deservedly winning a welcome award it might quite naturally have been repeated, but we cannot remember a definite repetition of this theme and the most popular attributes of it are the very one which he later omitted. Murphy grew from his best efforts. He knew when he had carried an idea to its uttermost conclusion and he never repeated the composition of his inspired themes although he so frequently repeated the "characteristic example."

It would be entirely arbitrary to fix any exact dates to define the three periods which we have designated as marking the development of Murphy's art. One merges gradually into the other, although in the early period we have remarked certain examples quite characteristic of the final period, as in the middle period we naturally find canvases which repeat the earlier effort as well as those which fortell the future. Beginning the study of art at an early age the first period may be said to terminate about 1885 and the

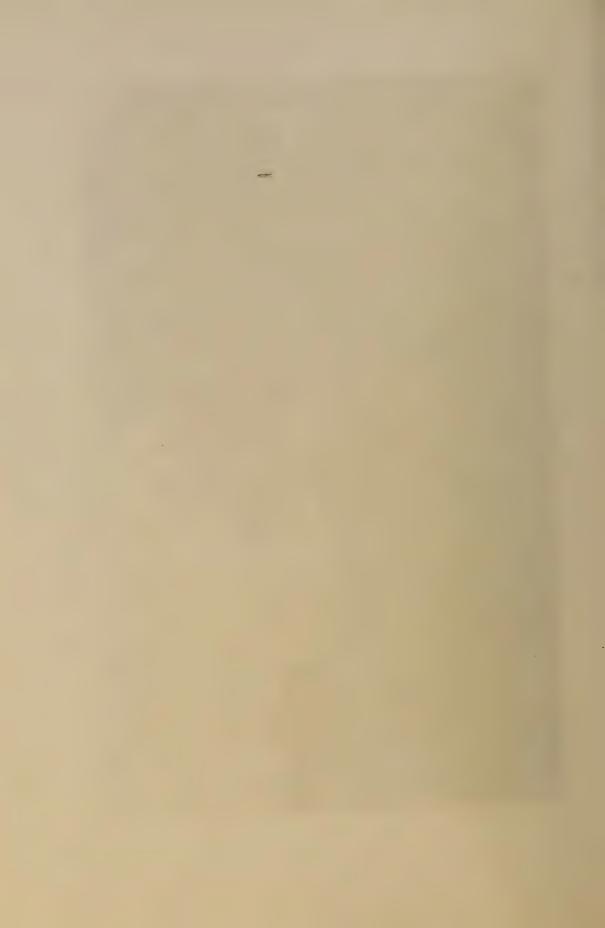
OCTOBER

Canvas, 32 inches high, 50 inches wide. Signed and dated lower left, "J. Francis Murphy '88 '93." The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. The property of the second sec

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middle period to continue until 1900. It is apparent, however, that at each period of Murphy's art there are canvases which completely embody the characteristic and unique expression of that particular time.

In the second period, therefore, we observe the definite influence of the tonal school, certain examples reflecting the direct contact with French landscape and with Corotin particular, while the association with Wyant is also apparent. The point of view is more intimate, the form is treated for significant mass and picturesque contour, the foreground is not overburdened with irrelevant detail, the composition is arranged for organized relation of form rather than purely descriptive landscape. The light is heightened at the point of focal concentration and the chiaroscuro is consciously gradated to bring together the principal masses and create a unity of effect. The sky forms a functional relation to the dominant masses in the picture. The evening hour is the favorite motive of this period, the golden light making a veiled background against which tree forms are arranged with telling silhouette.

The pictorial conception has a corresponding development in the technical manner of presenting it. Thus
we note the introduction of pigment textures to simplify and suggest form and to render the fundamental
elements rather than surface ornamentation, to give
the solidity and heaviness of earth, the moving and
ephemeral quality of sky, the soft fullness of foliage,
or the delicate veil of sere woods. The palette knife

takes the place of the brush and the under painting is carefully prepared before the final painting is attempted. Over this surface thin glazes of transparent color give depth and richness to the darker hues and the half tones are rendered with a semi-opaque scumble. Thus the Murphy method evolves gradually from the thinly painted surface to heavy impasto, from the carefully rendered subject to the suggested and improvised form.

The picture in the Corcoran Gallery at Washings ton, October, is dated 1886=93 and is the most im= portant in size as well as the most representative example of the period of which we are speaking. In its process we see much of the technical evolution of Murphy's art, though the finished surface gives little indication of the effort underneath. Pigment quality and texture, the glaze and scumble and dextrous final touch are all utilized in the calculated building up of the picture. We may even add that we can observe the later mannerism in the making. Here we find that virile solidity of structure, the understanding differentiation of essentials, combined with the delicate nuance, the gradated sequence and the evanescent hue which are the predominant attributes of Mur= phy's expression. And here too we remark the persistent and continued effort to perfect the picture before the signature of release. Reminiscent in composition and tone of both Inness and Wyant it has, nevertheless, the personal touch and the manifestation of sincere and deep feeling. The artist is growing

firmly and steadily within himself.

The Autumnal of 1894 is painted in the same mood and likewise shows the persistent endeavor toward perfection. It is apparently the same group of trees seen from a greater distance. Somewhat over conscious and studied in design, the composition has, nevertheless, a very noble poise and august balance. One does not find here the casual improvisation or the hurried touch, but rather the loving care of varied line, the deeply felt gradation and inserver the same group of trees seen from a greater distance. Somewhat over conscious and studied in design, the composition has, nevertheless, a very noble poise and august balance. One does not find here the casual improvisation or the hurried touch, but rather the loving care of varied line, the deeply felt gradation and inserver.

dwelling depth of tone.

More apparently in the Barbizon manner are several small oblong canvases, highly sophisticated in treatment and facile in rendering. The River Farm, a diminutive canvas in the proportion of one by two, is obviously a French landscape in which the low lying Normandy farm makes a decided center of interest. More fluid in the direct use of the brush than the later manner, the smaller pictures of this period have a decided painter-like quality. Unschooled in the more academic manner of the older painters, the young Murs phy found the new method entirely sympathetic to his hand and at the age of thirty painted like a French master. But it must be remembered, incidently, that at the time of which we are speaking the Barbizon pictures were just being introduced in our country and were not at all in the approved and popular style of our Hudson River School. So Murphy starts his career as a radical.

Murphy's technical manner and his pictorial con-

ception never fitted him for filling large surfaces or executing monumental paintings. But the eighties and nineties was the time of little pictures. The private home was used as a personal art gallery. The walls of which were hung with small and over-framed pictures, generally protected by shadow boxes. The whole interior was heavy and over burdened in effect. The old time parlor was in its glory. The demand therefore was for small pictures made important by heavy and expensive frames. Content with a most simple life and environment Murphy never sacrificed his artistic integrity, but it was happy indeed that he could make his living by producing these little pictures of his fancy.

There is a small picture called Late September. I remember it in the collection of Robert Handley. It is one of the masterpieces of American landscape painting and one in which Murphy reveals most truly the signature of his soul. A most felicitous composition it is compellingly inevitable and never to be repeated. It has that wistful melancholy combined with easy contentment, the idealistic grace springing naturally from the most homely environment. We do not feel anything of the factitious make up or the sentimental claptrap of picture making. The expression completely transcends the limitations of the canvas and one does not think in terms of size. Although all of Murphy's pictures are marked by a captivating patina and characteristic appeal of tone, comparative ly few reflect the true inspiration of his creative genius.

NEGLECTED LANDS

Canvas, 19 inches high, 27 inches wide. Signed lower right, "J. Francis Murphy." The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, Buffalo, N. Y.

NEGLECTED LANDS

Staff Disches high, 27 inches wide.

Tower right, 77 Francis Murphy, 29 diportion 32 lemy Buffalo, M. Yo San 21

with easy contentment, the idealis





Some of the finest smaller examples of Murphy's brush are dated in the nineties. The technical man= nerism of textured underpainting was not so obvious ly relied upon, and there is a very perfect relation be= tween the size of the picture and the method of presenting it. Rather low in tone the landscape serves as a foil for the evening sky, subdued but suggestive in color, with indwelling though suppressed radiance, and the sense of infinite expanse. In the smaller canvas the artist has expressed the beauty and immensity of heaven to a greater degree than in the pictures of larger area. The touch is delicate and fluid, the pigment more related to the brush than the palette knife. But with the transition to the higher key of the final period the sunset subject was discontinued although it still remains the most popular phase of Murphy's art.

In the final period Murphy attains his ultimate expression, the result of a gradual development toward the personal symbol. The more graphic and descriptive character of his work is entirely sacrificed, the ingratiating and colorful mood of the middle period is seldom repeated, everything is eliminated which was not a part of the essential spirit. His pictures attain the maximum degree of unity. Within the most simple pictorial composition he has created the symbol of freedom and expanse. It is the final statement of the release from the formal and acquired, the cared for and the elegant. Free, oh painter, to dwell upon the tumbled down, to indulge thy fancy for the picture

esque, free from the restraint of aristocratic demand and parlor prestige. Thou hast run away to fields forlorn, wistful in thy gazing onwards and upwards. It is the ultimate freedom, soon to be soaring in this air, and soon to be followed by the reaction toward form.

A vision finally fulfilled, complete, never to be repeated, unique. Devoid of the aesthetic exhilaration of design, entirely unconscious of entertaining brush work, without ornamental prettiness or captivating realization, the pictures of the final period pulsate with vibrant and contagious spirit. Opposed to flat brush work and that directness which consciously parades endeavor, the painted surface is everywhere animated.

ed and living.

In the aggregate the pictures of this period portray a single type of landscape, and reveal to the fullest extent the final expression of the painter. When the storm and stress of changing seasons has passed and the colorful contrasts of October are followed by the tranquil atmosphere of Indian summer, Murphy sees in landscape the response of his own soul. The heavy masses of trees in foliage, the dark silhouette, the rounded forms are followed by the ephemeral interlacing of leafless trees, when delicate branches fade in moisture laden skies and scattered leaves pattern in the brush. The earth is dry and sere, the last touches of living green have perished, the landscape is bathed in fast fading light.

"Ay, thou art welcome, heaven's delicious breath,

When woods begin to wear the crimson leaf, And suns grow meek, and the meek suns grow brief,

And the year smiles as it draws near its death.
Wind of the sunny south oh, still delay
In the gay wood and in the golden air,
Like to a good old age released from care,
Journeying, in long serenity, away."

Titles cannot suggest this landscape. A few descriptive words sufficed for many variations and the same title is often repeated, indicative of the season or time of day. The associative idea is so enveloped in the predominant mood that it transcends the limitation of place. Everything is still, a house alone or uninhabited, a distant barn; no cattle graze upon the fields, at most, perhaps, a touch of smoke only, telling of the presence of man or fallen tree forlorn. No sign of distant country, expectant, beyond; unending the horizon. In the stillness, perhaps the little things of earth give forth sentient vibration and the poet penestrates the secret.

In comparison with the earlier pictures the key is heightened and the range of values dimished. The chiaroscuro and the concentration of light at the focal point, so characteristic of the earlier work, is replaced by an evenness of lighting and a diffused radiance. The atmospheric envelopment is carried to the highest

degree of unity consistent with subtle variation. The oneness of effect is expressed without focal concentration and the emphasis is given more by the decisive accent than descriptive detail. Thus there is a certain concentration of the vision produced more by the arrangement of mass and the calculated spotting of foreground objects than by the more photographic tight= ening of the focus by means of defining detail. This gives that largeness of view, the feeling of expanse, of heightandbreadthanddepth. The formiseverywhere merely suggestive and entirely related to the mass. This extreme generalization is particularly consistent with the autumn season when the softness of the half tone is more apparent than the fullness of the form. Murphy's temperament merges with the theme and the theme is himself. Realistic in the larger attributes of earth and sky, he, nevertheless, by means of selec= tion and preferment, makes the landscape conform to his own sensibility. Posing in the homely association of environment and the realistic objects of neglected and lowly life, the subjective element of Murphy's art is truly idealistic. Familiar in the casual rendering of the elemental details of earth, his expression is, notwithstanding, abstract and transcendental. His theme in the ultimate sense is the unity of man with the un= known. His pictures express a continual seeking for the eternal. Change abruptly from an early example in which the objective interest is uppermost to the later expression and we will see at once the quest of the universal. The purely objective world of form did

not have a great interest for our painter; he finds in his simple compositional subject material enough for improvisation, and he plays upon its variations the eternal theme of yearning for unity. He reflects little of his actual environment except the light, the tone, and the effect of atmosphere, and uses his simple store of the objective world to reflect his subjective nature. Symbols all: a rail fence has served as well as an arbor, a barn as well as a castle, and weeds as well as flowers. We are not deceived by thy homely attributes, oh painter of the fields. Underneath the fallen log is thy living spirit; beneath thy gruff manner the shy and sensitive child.

The drawing comes to be merely the most summary indication. The brush is used with the lightest touch suggesting only the leading line and accenting the essential characteristics. The solid structure of the earth is rendered more by the heavy texture of underpainting than added detail, which in the later works assumes something of a mannerism. The near by pool so frequently used is a means of bringing the cool note of the sky down to earth, thus giving an emphatic contrast revealing the solidity of the ground, a pictorial device which Murphy learned from Wyant. The fallen tree, the corded wood and simple objects of interest are used for the more important effect of directing the eye to the distance or emphasizing the pictorial rhythm. The edge of the woods breaks the horizon and gives a background against which grace= ful trees are relieved. This simple and often repeated

motif suffices as the scaffolding for the tone and the quality of the pigment which is the true medium of expression. Therefracted edge, the quickened accent, the utmost simplicity of form, the absolute relation of values gives to the picture a very unusual carrying power. Delicate, soft and ephemeral, enveloped in an atmospheric ensemble, Murphy's pictures nevertheless reveal the bulk and weight of earth, the gradual recession of the ground, the definite character of trees, the ethereal quality of sky, and bring out the delicate nuance with its own particular significance in quite as telling a manner as the more striking objects in the composition. It is this subtle sense of relativity which gives an extraordinary force to the most delicate theme. His pictures have, in a word, the carrying power of nature. Like the singing quality of violins when properly attuned, quite as telling as the more blatant sounds of brass.

The period in which Murphy's finest pictures were produced is between 1901 and 1916. Within that time his message was fully consummated. In the last few years of his life the tone is not so sensitive, and the repeated quest of quality and unity resulted in a generalization inclining toward vacancy. His interest came to be finally in the light itself, the undescribable and subtle beauty of color as one sees it in November looking from the shade of a window outwards, when the variation of hue is so closely related to a predominant tone, producing a vibrant delicacy really transcending the limitations of mere paint.

LATE SEPTEMBER

Academy Board, 6 inches high, 10½ inches wide. Signed and dated lower right, "J. F. Murphy '97." Collection of Mr. Horatio S. Rubens, New York.

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c Board Sinches high, 10 /2 inches wider of List of er right; "J. F. Murphy "97 / 11 1 2 Condition S. Rubens, New York.

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In 1904 we have the October Day. In this one pic= ture the painter seems to have told his simple story in the most compelling and definitive manner. It is one of the most perfect examples of Murphy's brush. The masterpiece of a life of continuous striving for the fulfillment of a single idea. The photographer can merely suggest the subject. Its great beauty lies in the tonal envelopment combined with the perfect harmonizas tion of subject with sentiment. There is a supreme poise in this picture that seems almost the embodiment of faith; a serene stillness the symbol of contemplative contentment; an expectant hush indicative of the unknown beyond. It is more than a landscape, and yet how simple and homely in its theme. How significant the rail fence, what a compelling accent, how tell= ing the fallen leaves; how subtly varied the simple silhouette. We get more than a sensuous exhilaration, more than a skillful description of a place and yet strangely this picture seems the veritable prototype of all such places.

In the Gray Day of 1908 the color scheme is in variations of closely harmonized tones. The textures play an important part in the structural solidity. The handling is vivacious and emphatic. Simple in compositional scheme there is a happy relation of the action of the trees with the movement of the clouds. The termination of leaf and branch is suggestive of the mannerism of Corot. The impulse of the picture and the rhythm has something in it of the changing weather which it

describes.

In the Grove and Field of 1912 we feel the utmost evanescence and suggestive charm combined with the rugged and barren solidity of earth; the sense of ethere al expanse combined with the newness of trees and scattered wood. How well the vision is focused without any tightening of the brush or added detail; how perfectly the refracted edge is suggested rather than seen; always the quickened emphasis where the rhythm requires it, and the softened termination where the formis lost. The homely details of earth and sky are made secretly to function in a purely abstract design, and the significance of relativity is highly sensed.

Murphy seldom composed within the square proportion; the composition is always dictated by the horizon; the division of areas given by the simple upright screen of woods. This favorite motif is most happily rendered in the Russet Season of 1915. On a canvas in the proportion of two by three the horizon breaks well below the center, giving the sense of heavenly expanse; the border of trees on the left forms a graceful contour, made more effective by the slender upright tree and the decided horizontal contrast of fallen logs, emphatically punctuated by the woodman's axe. A meadow brook leads from the foreground in a curve echoing the line of trees and directing the eye to the distance; an old barn breaks the horizon on the right, the angular gable of which adds a telling form revealing by contrast the suggested expanse of distance. Thus we note that Murphy balances the softened form

by the decisive contrast and although the effect is delicate it is never sentimentally sweet or vapid. This illustrates the fundamental trait of Murphy's character, that happy marriage of masculine virility with passive feminine charm. We have, too, that splendid sense of relativity, the solidity of earth gives ethereal quality to the sky; the softened edge of foliage adds vitality to the tree trunk that sustains it; the gradually receding plane gives added significance to the dome of heaven; the curved line is balanced by the angular; the emphatic accent keeps the softened form from being over vaporous. Representing the typical aspect of familiar landscape the composition is nevertheless arranged withmost exacting and understanding care, the varied forms are definitely related to a carefully organized unity. In the unimportant examples one may tire of the repeated and calculated devices of picture making, in the inspired can vases like the Russet Season one feels their inevitable necessity.

At times, too, we feel merely the arbitrary arrangement of a clump of trees poised on the left of the canvas against a barren horizon; charming in tone and typical in manner, yet only by way of being another picture. One is over conscious of the technical mannerism, the methodical underpainting, the pool so apparently placed, the corded wood, the sinewy trees and the stereotyped devices of the Murphy style. But one is greatly rewarded by the inspired examples, enveloped in mood and mirrored in the heart of the artist. So the Autumn Evening with its sense of inevitable

reality; The Autumnal with the surge of significant and symbolical line; the Hills and Fields so completely characteristic of our eastern country or the Grove and Field in which one is imbued with the mood of the artist and lives in the indwelling spirit of the landscape. So Murphy reclaims and proclaims himself.

PART THREE

EVERY expression has a content, a conception and a means of projecting it. The content belongs more to the age than the individual. It is the leaven, unformed; the group thought. The conception is concerned with the personal endeavor to give the vague yearning and passing emotion a definite and lasting form. The method of expression belongs to the craft to which the individual adds his personal technique.

The most characteristic trait of an artist is often that of which he is most unconscious. Knowledge acquired by force of will and intellect is too dearly bought to be forgotten; but that which is innate is too near to be recognized. As one is so much a part of ones own time that its characteristics cannot be justly estimated, so that which is a part of ones nature is not objectively measured. Likewise it is only in historical retrospect that one can gain a comparative idea of the significance and import of the works of a given time or of an individual artist who is a part of it.

The content of Murphy's art is a part of his epoch. It is the outgrowth of the reaction from the artificial and the unnatural which finds its first utterance in the

later part of the eighteenth century resulting in the political upheaval of revolution. It is likewise a return to the traditions of the North as distinguished from the classical traditions of the South.

In a time which produced the noble and the prelate, and looked consciously to a higher order, we cannot conceive of the reproduction of the lowly, of the mood engendered by melancholy and introspection. In an age of liveries and lackeys we must likewise look for ostentation and display. The red velour belongs to the gilded chair and the lace which adorns my lady who sits thereon. When the court plays at pastorals the ground is no longer made of common clay, but like a theatre wherein gallants play a part, is made of scented greensward and patterned for the play. Unwelscome dreaded guest, the reality of self! Oh terrible time when gay lords must reckon with reality. Fates ful time when the artificial is overthrown with blood.

In painting, this awakening of the individual spirit severs the servile tradition with the past. It is related to the change of patronage, from the desire of the aristocracy and their followers for the elegant and decorative, the echo of the classical and the artificiality of historical associations, to the aspiration and realization of the individual. It is the natural manifestation of the yearning for the true and significant, the living impulse as distinguished from the effete repetition of false or empty conceptions. It is a direct return to nature: self seeking.

In England Constable is the true father of modern

landscape painting, amassing a wealth of material gathered from personal impression and observation and finding his theme in his every day world. In France Theodore Rousseau restores the northern tradition, holds nature as a sacred example and derives his forms therefrom. Corot reanimates the rhythms of Claude, but brings them nearer earth; while Millet sees his subjects in their natural environment unrelieved by the

play pastoral of his predecessors.

The direct influence of these masters comes to New York in the seventies where sentiment has been attuned by forces similar to the old countries and where the receptive spirit is intuitively awakened. Inness, dissatisfied with the more superficial accessories of picture making, has felt the appeal of kindred souls and sees in nature other visions than those of artificially fashioned landscape. Wyant comes to realize the significance of simplified forms and the emotional power engendered by their expressive relation.

In literature Jean Jacques Rousseau heralds the return to nature; Chateaubriand seeks romance in the wild, uncultivated, remote, and restores the gothic tradition of the North. Outward glitter and display gives place to brooding melancholy and sentimental introspection. In England Shelley dreams of the spirit freed of convention and Wordsworth imbues nature with a soul and enters into communion therewith. In America we echo the foreign urge. Thoreau is the most pronounced embodiment of individualism and self independence. He is nourished on nature and lives

in harmony with her ways and moods; Whitman more egoistic lounges passively to the earth song. The lowly, the uncultivated, the natural, the common, the ordinary, find in man a sympathetic and intimate response. Art in short becomes democratized. The subject changes from the elegant and artificial, reminiscences of past glory and high estate, addressed to the cultured and luxurious, to the more humble and less extravagant theme derived from personal experience and individual reaction.

It is not merely an artistic caprice that painters come to like the tumbled down, the weeds and marsh es, the unkempt fields, the wayward path. Signs not merely of the pictures que but of that deep revoltofman from the tyranny of oppressive form, and the yearning for reality in the simple and unadorned. It is not by chance, then, that Murphy instinctively portrays the lonely expanse of waste fields and uncultivated lands, or draws with loving care the weeds and flowers of the fields; not merely the sentimental picture maker who watches the brooding sky or seeks beauty in the fading light of day. Fields, the homely waywardness of the fields, their naturalness and simplicity, the unaffected beauty of the fields. The common earth, mother of all things. The sky, not mounting zenithward in splendor, but always beyond, hovering friendly over the horizon. Earth and sky.

This, the content of all that Murphy painted, is his instinctive inheritance. Not the sumptuous form of opulent trees, joyous sunshine and blue sky, or the

splendor of flowered fields; no lure of that earthly paradise wherein mandreams in verdured vales and flowing rivers wind their way; but low, unattended stretches, sered woods or barren hills. Gray melancholy, alone. Murphy sees no unfriendliness in solitude; there are voices in the silence, whisperings in evanescent twilight, communion with earth spirit and self communion. The sentiment is not bitter, or morose. It is blithe and enchanting. No hint of impending catastrophe, no suggestion of the dramatic, but an aerie melancholy fond of its own musing. Earth is not merely the place of human toil, of livelihood and hardened lives; man has left the fields his day's work done. Nature has its own life, its own reverie.

This simple landscape, bare of outer show, is enveloped in the glamour of golden light. This is the secret of that magical charm which transforms the harshness of earth, bathes the sky with indwelling radiance and imbues the picture with spiritual significance. The simplest aspect of nature has become the medium of revealing the mood of man. The expression is purely suggestive; the manifestation but a mood symbol.

The evolution of Murphy's art is in revealing this sentiment freed from irrelevant and unrelated matter. The pictorial theme is reduced to the simplest structure. The ingratiating accompaniments of picture making are sacrificed until the mood stands revealed in its ultimate purity. The theme is completed. Beyond is merely aërial vacancy. The painter can go no

RAIN

Canvas, 16 inches high, 22 inches wide. Signed and dated lower right, "J. Francis Murphy 1908." TO A SECTION OF A

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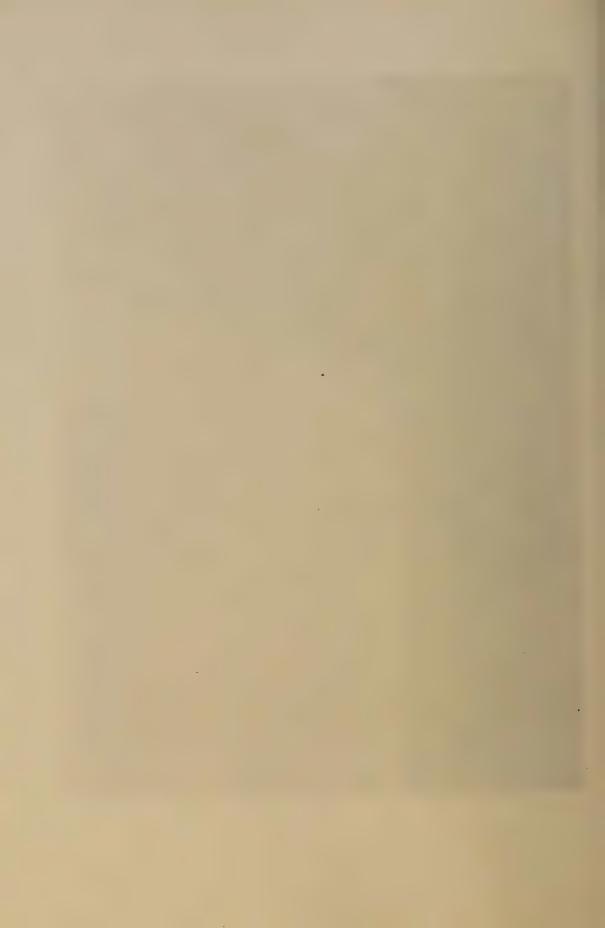
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farther; his single idea is consummated. With the simplest pictorial material, the most humble theme, Murphy creates a picture of transcendent charm.

The content of Murphy's art is, however, in no way unique. It was the common property of his epoch. He has given no new idea or subject matter; he has invented no new design or aesthetic innovation; his color awakens no new sensation; he has erected no architectonic scaffolding on which others might build. His work is not intellectual. He has stamped his personality on the surface, in the patina, the characteristic touch, the tone sequence and atmospheric envelopment. His expression depends upon the nice relation of harmonious tones and tender gradation within a well-balanced compositional theme, imbued with exquisite sensibility and expressive feeling, essentially tranquil and serene, wistful and melancholy.

It will be seen, therefore, that Murphy's art is more personal than original, more expressive than creative. For we must distinguish between personal feeling and that more highly synthesized and creative projection which transcends the sensuous impression; between the personal emotion and the impersonal conception. Gradation, envelopment, and tone sequence, apart from representative form, is perhaps the most alluring and ingratiating element in modern painting. Although feelingly expressive, it is hardly related to the sheer creation of form, the architectonic design of the great masters. It is analogous to the gradation of sound in modern orchestration, the use of crescendo

and diminuendo, so emotionally compelling and yet

often so constructively vacant.

This personal feeling, expressed in tonal relation and enveloped in atmospheric ensemble, is most completely rendered within the simplest design. It does not allow of strong structural form, of interrelated solids or rhythmic action. Thus we see only two fundamental planes in Murphy's pictures: the earth flat and receding, the sky upright, and the foil of bare trees giving a simple angular contrast. The perspective vanishes in thin cloud veils, always beyond, indefinite, symbol of the unknown. The form is never absolute, never fully defined, always suggestive. This suggestion becomes not merely a technical mannerism, but a language in itself, the very means of avoiding the final and decisive, the symbol of uncertainty. Forms do not come outward indicating circular volumes, but always recede. The scattered wood, the fallentree, the stone fence point always to the distance; the edge of the woods merely emphasizes the horizon. The type of sky is invariably chosen with the light beyond, diffused and never apparent. No indication ever of the blue dome of heaven, colored roof of the world; no rounded clouds sailing over heaven's seas in wave-like motion. Silence, solitude, serenity. A soul bathed in uncertainty, waiting.

The pictorial conception is extremely simple. It is little more than a nice relation of horizontal and vertizal within a given space. The proportion is oblong; the horizon just below the center of the canvas. The

composition is invariably static. There is little invention in design. The rhythm is rendered more by gradation or variation of light and dark than by line. The interest is in the middle ground or distant sky. The curve or the rounded form plays no part in the conception. The compositional content verges upon the vague and anemic. It is held together only by the tone sequence. In this sense Murphy repeats the style of his predecessors. It is the inheritance from the low lands of Holland in which the horizon forms such a conspict uous part. It is continued by Rousseau and the painters of Barbizon and followed by Inness and Wyant.

There is a profound psychological index in the aesthetic use of form and line, the unconscious record of the spiritual sensibility of a given time, far more potent in its revelation of mankind then the more patent facts of history. There is little variation of the dominant structural scheme in nineteenth-century landscape art, and it denotes a certain passivity rather than animated activity. Constable's conception of the volume of form is seldom repeated, except perhaps by the virile Courbet, and the static theme based upon the horizontal remains the predominant pictorial idea of nineteenth-century landscape painting. It is natural therefore that Murphy should repeat this traditional form for his was a passive rather than an active nas ture. Sentimentally it was a recollection of boyhood days in the middle states, but for one who passed the last half of life in a mountainous country in which the flat horizon is absent and the curved line and full-

ness of form is everywhere apparent, this static tendency was far more deeply rooted in his nature than sentimental recollection. His apparent likes and dislikes show this personal limitation, which if you will is the making of personal character. Certainly a pronounced limitation gives a definite direction to manifestion, as we may note in many of Murphy's contemporaries. Murphy disliked the sturdy fullness, the rotund majesty of the oak tree, and the fir seldom figures in his pictures. The apparent or obvious form was not sympathetic. He loved the slender trees that one sees on the edge of a clearing, the second growth that follows where nobler trees have fallen; or young: er shoots that feed by wayside pools untroubled by the farmer. Here we have an index of Murphy's nature far more accurate than biographical chronicle. It is the delicate, the tranquil, the serene with which he is spiritually associated. He loved the marsh and the tender things that grow therefrom more than the trees, for he was deeply knowing of the little things of nature. He was on good terms with nature as he was with man and was closely drawn to the inner nature of life.

PART FOUR

MURPHY was not a colorist in the full sense of the term. His color is related to values and his values to light. He was therefore more truly a tonalist than a colorist. He worked within a very limited range of related hues and produced the effect more

AFTERNOON IN OCTOBER

Canvas, 24 inches high, 361/4 inches wide.

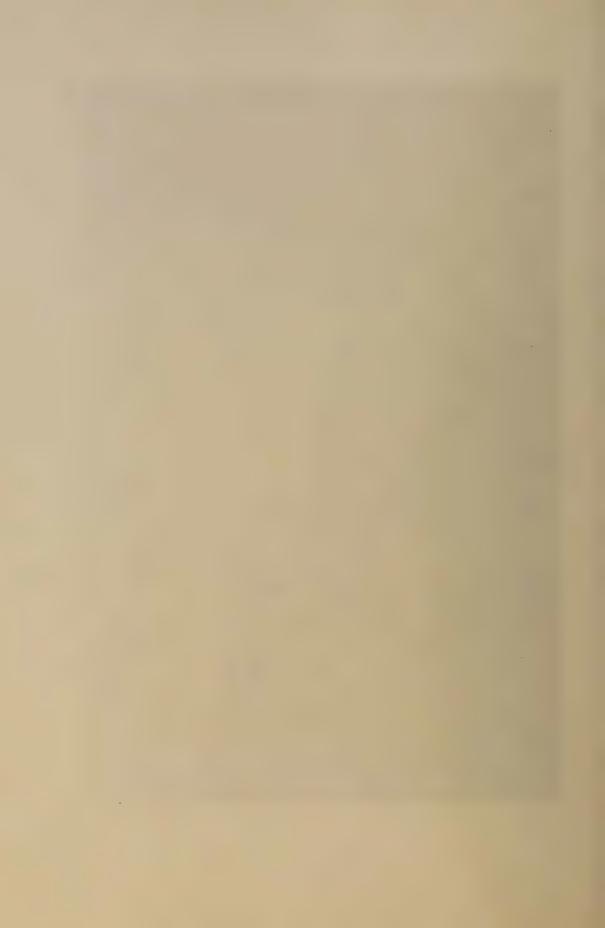
Signed and dated lower right, "J. Francis Murphy 1909."

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AURIHY was not a colorist in the term. The colorist in the was more than a colorist. He was more stone more to ust than a colorist. He was a large of a fixed home to by the days the





with harmonic variations than contrasts. The typical color scheme of Murphy is based as much upon its replation to the gold frame as upon its more realistic attributes and he created the tonal quality largely by the frame as a point of departure. His pictures are not conceivable apart from the gold background. This

determined the key of the picture.

A study of the palette reveals the fact that the relation of the natural pigments of the warm scale forms a sequence both of value and hue but of a similar degree of intensity. We note the harmonic relation of the earth and mineral colors, from yellow ochre, gold ochre, raw sienna to burnt sienna, and from the warmer light red through venetian to indian red. Whereas if we turn directly to the cool side of the palette we see immediately that the colors are of a deep value and limited in number. Murphy was conscious of this fact, as the setting of his palette indicates, and his color scheme is based upon the natural attributes of the earth pigments. We do not recollect a positive blue, purple or green in any of his pictures. The cool note was attained primarily by its relation to the predominant warm hue and hardly ever transcended a gray. The admixture of white imparted a cool hue to the color and likewise rendered the more opaque atmospheric quality of the sky. Murphy did not experiment with the full gamut of the palette either in hue or value, but he had a very subtle appreciation of the intrinsic relation of a given color to its value and did not over darken or lighten it to reduce its nature.

Thus he worked in the normal scheme of the pigment itself and did not strain its possibilities. In the science of the palette we may say that he worked entirely within the middle register both in value and intensity and that the range of both is limited to stress relation rather than contrast.

This will explain why Murphy was more success ful in his pictures of autumn than of spring. In the latter the green is related to the gold of the frame by graying it to the same degree of neutrality and raising it in value by means of white. But it will be seen that the natural range of this hue is limited. It cannot go toward blue without becoming appreciably darker unless raised by white, and it cannot go far in the sequence of yellow without losing its character or be= coming more intense by the intermixture of a brilliant yellow and thus losing its approximation to the neutrality of the gold of the frame. As Murphy produced his effect by subtle variations in value he had to light= en the green with white and thus lost that more transparent and richer quality of the warmer colors and their natural variations. Murphy did not use complimentary contrast and his pictures in green are therefore reduced to almost a monotone.

Murphy's method of painting was purely personal, the outcome of that intangible and evanescent mood which cannot be rendered by the more direct and obvious means of painting. His aim was to conceal the means entirely so that the brush strokes and the material devices of manipulation would not be apparent.

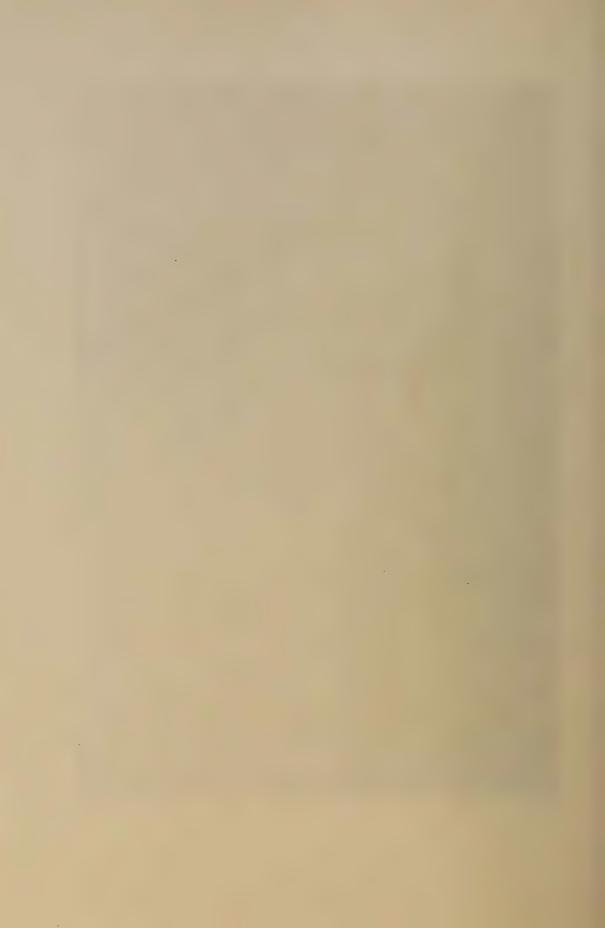
GROVE AND FIELD

Canvas, 24 inches high, 36 inches wide. Signed and dated lower right, "J. Francis Murphy 1912." Collection of Mr. Peter W. Rouss, New York. in the second of the second of

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Dexterous, skilled and decisive, his painting never parades itself; facile, subtle and rhythmatic his brush does not separate itself from the totality of effect. The technic is engendered by the mood and intimately related to the feeling to be expressed. The man and his

work are inseparable.

Murphy was not a brushman in the painter's meaning of that term. He did not paint directly la premier coup; nor did he use a sketch to work from in the studio. The direct study from nature was made with pencil notes, in later life mere summary indications hastily rendered on some stray piece of paper or envelope. His subjects were not definite transcripts of particular places; his impression was formed largely by random observation and later synthesized to convey merely a general type of landscape. The color combines fullness of tone with transparency and an indescribable pigment quality beautiful in itself. To effect this result the canvas was first carefully prepared with an underpainting which was applied with a stiff heavy pigment in the predominant hues of the given theme, generally in variations of gold and brown. The palette knife flattened the pigment, thus imparting the maximum power of reflection without the small shadows caused by the interstices of the brush and creating a pigment texture suggestive of the bulk and weight of earth and the aerial softness of sky. This was allowed to dry over a period of several months. When thoroughly hardened the pigment was pumiced or smoothed, forming a solid, lacquer-like surface.

Meantime the canvas with its variations of texture and hue became suggestive of the theme. When the moment of painting arrived the conception was fully formed.

In the second painting the pigment was brushed very thinly intermixed with sicikatif de Harlem al= lowing the underpainting to partly show through. The picture was continued while the paint was still wet, but if the result was not satisfactory the surface was scraped and with rags and turpentine the fresh paint entirely removed and the canvas restored to its first underpainting to await a new adventure. This method permits of the utmost freedom of suggestion in brushing and explains the lightness of touch and dexterous improvisation so happily combined with solidity and texture, and tells, too, how the pigment quality is attained without the laboured effect of repeated overpainting. The thin, cool overpainting also adds that particular atmospheric effect so character= istic of Murphy's landscape. In the pictures of the middle period, which are darker in value, there is considerable transparent glazing to produce depth of hue, and also the suggested half tones of branches against the sky or tangled underbrush. The touch in the final painting is liquid, living and inimitable. No element of his work is more characteristic of the painter's personality.

Thus Murphy combines the most deliberate schematic composition with the accidentals of a dexterous technic, the most casual and summary handling over

a carefully prepared ground and unites the lightness and freedom of instinctive improvisation with a calculated pigment quality. This gives that indefinable charm to his work in which the ultimate is enveloped in the ephemeral.

PART FIVE

APICTURE is so much paint and material matter merely, until it is quickened by the comprehension. Brought into being by the idea of its creator, it is reanimated only when that idea finds a sympathetic response. The true significance, therefore, of an artist's work is the living reaction of the beholder. As in so many mirrors, the idea becomes reflected and lives again. There can be no didactic or single judgment, no arbitrary measure or standard. It is manifestly unfair and irrelevant to measure the intention of one artist by the different conception of another. The final import of Murphy's achievement exists, therefore, in the individual minds of those who have beheld his pictures. Living for those who find a significance therein, dead for those to whom it is dead.

Lacking all sumptuous form and sensuous exhiliration, devoid of ornamental prettiness and stylistic elegance, it is surprising that his pictures should appeal so truly to the average man. There is a deep significance in the love of Murphy's art far more profound than the conscious realization of their producer, a significance most truly sensed by the unsophisticated. It is an indication of the spirit of a time far removed from

the superficial surface of outward activity, a spirit indicative of the yearning for the simple and unaffected, the homely and natural. The merchant, the money changer in the market, chained to the demands of the machine, restless, worried and nervous, looks wistfully at the expanse of earth and sky, the unadorned and self-keeping fields, free from care. Surrounded by luxury and artificial glamour with desires measured by dollars, wound up, clock like, kept going, the man in his city cage feels unconsciously the simple spirit of the lover of weeds, of earth and sky, and shares his reverie, less alone than in the presence of nature. For nature is merely a symbol to man. This creator of fields and sky has placed a symbol upon walls of gold, a symbol strangely in contrast to its environment. Not merely a window looking upon the fields of nature, it is the expression of one who finds tranquility and contentment in solitude. No mere slice of nature this, but a symbol of serenity and silence, of happy days with nature communing.

It is doubtful whether the farmer would be enticed by this landscape. He would find the fields neglected, the fences broken, the land undrained, the trees not worth cutting. He would see no fertility or means of livelihood therefrom. Your merchant would at once improve these fields, or fence around an estate, separate and apart, costly in its upkeep, of lawn and garden and artificial fancies. Alone with nature your office man would be but alone. Yet unwittingly he loves this soul who has found some glimpse of freedom

RUSSET SEASON

Canvas, 24 inches high, 36 inches wide. Signed and dated lower left, "J. Francis Murphy 1915." Collection of Mr. Amos F. Prescott, New York.

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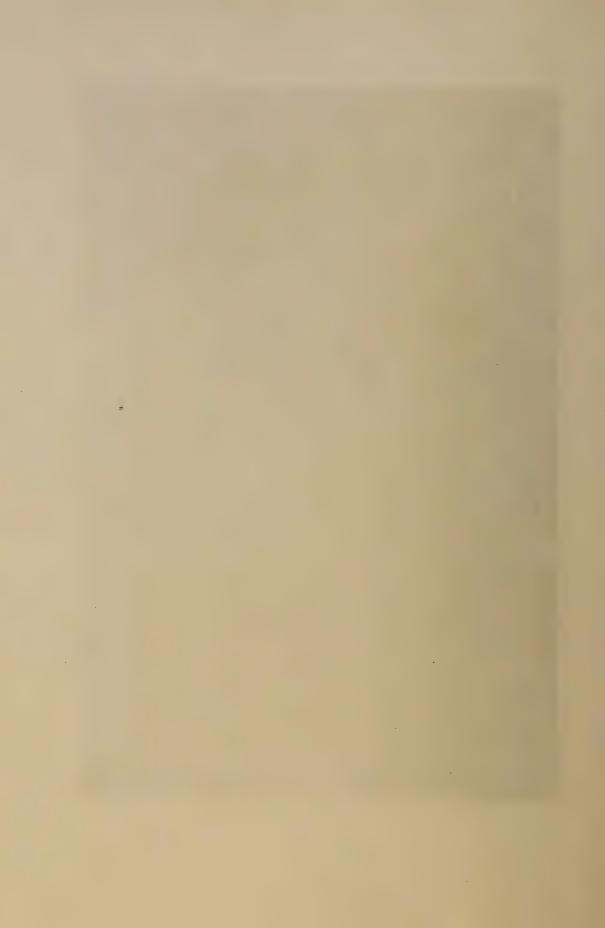
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and tranquility, and aspires not to the confines of an estate.

Worth more than the land it portrays, the treasure is negotiated in. The estimate of the man is measured by dollars. Beware! oh trader in the market place, with too much handling the vision may vanish.

It is rather to easy to dismiss Murphy's art as being merely an echo of the Barbizon school. In fact this is to miss its significance entirely. Certain appended details, of the early work in particular, the ornament of picture making, are certainly derived from French sources. But the indwelling sentiment, if it relate to the French school at all, is precisely the thing that the French borrowed from the English and is in no sense typically French. It is likewise due to the popular mode of generalizing or grouping the masters referred to under the generic title of a locality and thus uniting men entirely disparate in purpose and sentiment. For it would be difficult to name three contemporaries more different in nature than Rousseau, Millet and Corot. If we would seek for origin it would be more appropriate to do so relative to the derivation of sentiment, and this we should say is more truly English than French and more Irish than English. For Murphy's expression reflects the aridity of earth rather than its sumptuousness, of poverty rather than bounty; and reflects, too, not British aristocratic pride but a certain lowliness of the Irish. The vision is always near the earth. No echo of opulence, of park or estate, no ornamental decoration indicative of conscious care or formality, no thrifty husbandry. Nor do we find that impeccable mastery of method so characteristic of the French, the rationalistic desire to embody the idea in absolute form, which with Rousseau, for example, became a governing passion. Murphy's art on the contrary is essentially suggestive. His fundamental method does not permit of the realization or representation of form for itself. It evades the definite and precise and renders by means of tone and pigment quality, only the illusive and ephemeral. His art is

therefore more poetical than truly pictorial.

Murphy's relation to his American contemporaries was more immediate and also more resourceful. He began his artistic career at a time when the romantic movement was awakening the interest of the most active and sensitive minds, when the reaction against the topographical and photographic manner of Dusseldorf and the Hudson River School was already a decided force. He was therefore not trained under the same traditions as Inness, Wyant or Martin who, it must be remembered, were among the most exemplary masters in the style of the older school before the awakening of their mature expression. It is apparent that both Inness and Wyant had a very appreciable influence in the formative period of Murphy's art. It is true that Inness was too temperamental, impulsive and comprehensive to effect Murphy permanently. With natures so widely disparate there was little cause for any lasting spiritual affiliation, but there are certain pictures by Inness which gave a definite focus

HILLSIDE FARM

Canvas, 16 inches high, 24 inches wide.
Signed lower left, "J. Francis Murphy."
Collection of Mr. Peter W. Rouss, New York.

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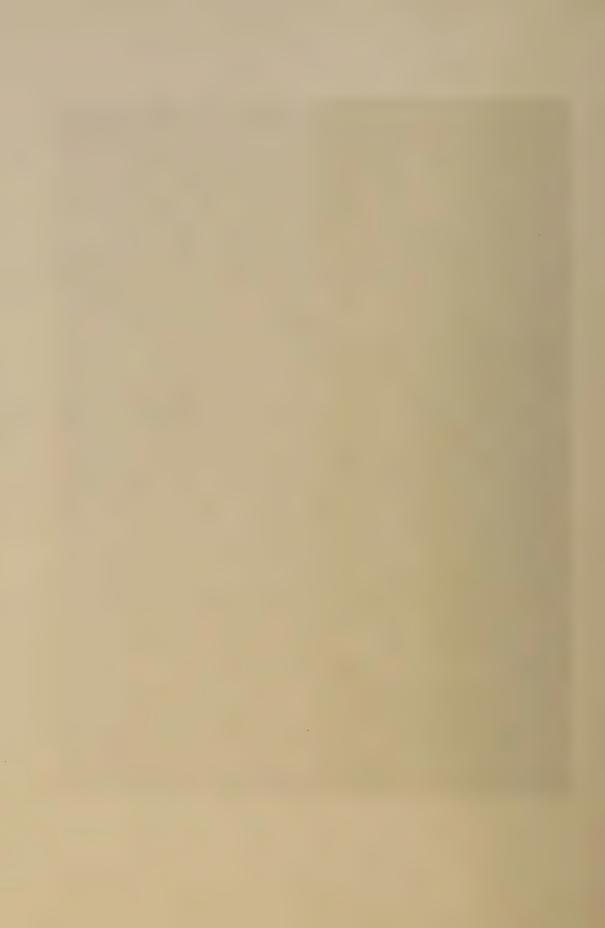
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to Murphy's tone and composition, pictures which for Inness were but a small part of his versatile and profound vision, but which for Murphy were the introduction to a life-long theme. The personal proximity of Wyant at Arkville and the mature power of his art at a time when Murphy was still finding himself was the definite cause of a sympathetic and more lasting influence. Although Wyant was not deeply attached to the younger painter, and at times resented his presence, there was a certain limitation in his own nature, and a singleness of endeavor in his painting which made him a more appreciable and applicable source than the more impetuous and changing character of Inness. It is in the middle period of Murphy's art that we find the most direct influence of Wyant. The simplified theme of silhouette in evening light, the tone, the restricted palette, reflect the tendency of the older painter. Murphy does not seek in experimental endeavor for other artistic affinities. He seems to see his way at once and does not deviate from the chosen path. But he has a complete mastery within his given limitations and he is a master in clearly recognizing them. In this respect Murphy is similar to Whistler and strange as it may have seemed to their contemporaries, the two artists are in many ways closely related. For Murphy, although a rustic in his love of country and retirement, is fastidious and careful to the highest degree in his painting. Both masters worked within a very limited range, both extreme tonalists. Whistler choosing the sequences of gray

and neutral hues, and Murphy working within closes ly related russets and browns; both composing with the most simple linear design — Whistler giving his work something of an oriental flair in decorative pattern and Murphy insisting always on harmonious space relations. We do not mean to stress the comparison, but with natures so different otherwise, their pictures when hung together belong at once to the same age: vague, suggestive, undefined, mood envels

oped.

We cannot, however, measure the man according to the standards of greatness, without being decidedly conscious of his limitations. Certainly, no dynamic force let loose upon the surface of the earth. Man is given to differ from the earth, insomuch as he is changeable; differ from the fixed and static insomuch as he lives and finds his true being and active consciousness in contemplation and flight of intellect; voy= aging over the world, daring, adventuring, living in the past, the present and the future. Such is more the attribute of greatness. Such was a Shakespeare, creating the tender lyrical and enchanting music of the sonnets, and the stern realities of Lear. So, too, was Goethe, sentimental and melancholy in Werther, grand and impersonal in his later creation, completely estranged from his earlier expression. Or note the early work of Turner and compare it to the transcendental expression of his later life. We live by contrast as well as affinity, and the greatness of a character is measured largely by its foundations. Thus we see the

monumental Michael Angelo, strong set and solid, an unfinished pile but imposing, not towering into thin air pinnacle like, but lying heavily upon the earth and bound by the fetters thereof. Or Beethoven, tramping downcast, with the war of unrest unceasing in his ears, a dramatic reality surrounded by the tinsel of parlor chairs and embroidery. No effete tower, illusion like vanishing in the sky like the fantasmagoria of an oriental trickster. A giant in chains, more like the traditional Prometheus, initiated in the secrets of the Gods and suffering the penalties therefrom.

But do we enter into the wistful melancholy of man, conscious of his limitations, far from that turbulent throng beating furously upon the gates of heaven; do we stand at evening and watch the passing day as the light lingers over you barren horizon, we then seek consolation and rest and enter more contentedly into the homely realms of earth and sing with the last notes of evening birds, flying lowly in the branches and weeds, unaware of the perilous flight of eagles

overhead.

The restless ones do wrong to measure the littleness of man and become more little in consciously spying thereon; not like the great ones constant in upward flight nor fouling the earth beneath. For earth has its sweetness and weeds and lowly flowers their charm, and many a pretty secret is wafted in the air.

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In 1885 Murphy was awarded the Second Hallgarten Prize and in 1910 the Inness Gold Medal by the National Academy of Design; in 1902 the Carnegie Prize, Society of American Artists; 1899, Gold Medal, Pennsylvania Academy, Philadelphia; 1887, Webb Prize, Society American Artists; 1894, Evans Prize, American Water Color Society; 1901, Silver Medal, Pan = American Exposition; 1902, Gold Medal, Charleston Exposition; 1904, Silver Medal, St. Louis Exposition; 1911, Evans Prize, Salmagundi Club; 1915, Silver Medal, Pan Pacific Exposition, San Francisco. He was a member of the National Academy of Design, Society of American Artists, New York Water Color Club, American Water Color Society, Salmagundi Club, Lotus Club, National Arts Club and the Century Club of New York.

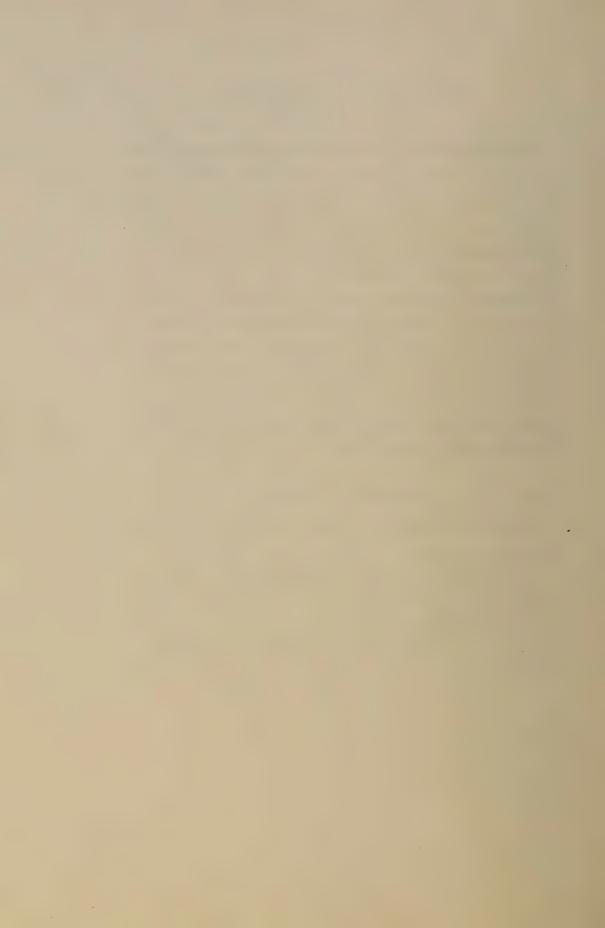
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